

2021 Florida Forever Five-Year Plan

Coastal Headwaters Longleaf Forest

Summary of Recommendations and Status
as of
December 2020



Division of State Lands
Florida Department of Environmental Protection



Coastal Headwaters Longleaf Forest

Less-Than-Fee Project

Escambia, Santa Rosa

Project-at-a-Glance

Year Added to Priority List	2014
Project Acres	99,544
Acquired Acres	0
Cost of Acquired Acres	\$0
Remaining Project Acres	99,544
2019 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres	\$128,581,511

Purpose for State Acquisition

Acquiring a perpetual conservation easement over the Coastal Headwaters Longleaf Forest would preserve working forest lands and return them to the historic stands of longleaf pine and accompanying understory habitat for flora and fauna and provide resource protection for the Escambia River watershed.

This proposal meets the public purposes for Florida Forever lands that include enhancing the coordination and completion of other, nearby, land acquisition projects; increasing protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels; protecting, restoring, and maintaining the quality and natural functions of land, water, and wetland systems of the state; ensuring that sufficient quantities of water are available to meet the current and future needs of natural systems and the citizens of the state; preserving significant archaeological or historic sites; and increasing the amount of forest land available for sustainable management of natural resources.

The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation prepared by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory shows that 95 percent of the site contributes to protecting surface water, 100 percent to aquifer recharge, 21 percent to functional wetlands, and 18 percent to natural floodplain functions. About 87 percent of the site contributes to ecological greenways.



Manager(s)

The property would continue to be managed by the current owner, Resource Management Services, with periodic management oversight by the state to confirm compliance with agreed-upon easement conditions. The representatives of RMS described issues and activities they expect to address in the conservation easements they negotiate with Florida:

1. As existing stands of loblolly and slash pine are finally harvested, all soils capable of supporting longleaf pine will be regenerated with longleaf pine and managed to promote herbaceous understory development;
2. All longleaf pine stands that can be prescribed burned without undue liability risk will be burned at a frequency approximating every 5 years at a minimum, and on a more frequent basis as funding to conduct burns is available;
3. The predominance of longleaf pine over-story trees in any stand will be approximately 45 years of age or older before final harvest occurs;
4. No heavy mechanical site preparation will be done prior to regeneration; no stand will be bedded prior to longleaf pine establishment; and,
5. RMS is willing to burn on greater frequency and carry longleaf to older age classes than stated above; five years for burns and 45 years for over-story age are the base case for easement valuation.

General Description

The Coastal Headwaters Longleaf Forest Florida Forever proposal covers 99,498 acres (per proposal; 99,544 acres as determined by GIS) in northern Escambia and central and western Santa Rosa counties, with 51,222 acres in Escambia County, and 48,109 acres in Santa Rosa County (GIS measurements have that as 51,202 acres and 48,342 acres, respectively). The Lower Escambia River Water Management Area bisects the two main tracts of the proposal. The Perdido River Water Management Area is about 6 miles south of the proposal in Escambia County. Two of the easternmost tracts of the proposal are adjacent to the western boundary of Blackwater River State Forest. These two tracts are also adjacent to the Wolfe Creek Forest Florida Forever Project which, in conjunction with the Clear Creek/Whiting Field Florida Forever Project, would form a continuous corridor between Blackwater River State Forest and Naval Air Station Whiting Field, if acquired. State Road 89 passes through the proposal area.

The property has been managed for commercial timber production and, to a much lesser extent, private hunting, fishing, camping, and other outdoor recreation. Prescribed fire is used for site preparation for planting, particularly of longleaf pine stands. If a conservation easement is established on the property, the application outlines a plan to plant longleaf pine stands for the purposes of ecological restoration and sustainable forestry with a 5-year rotation of



prescribed fire. The proposed project is located on the Escambia Terraced Lands and on the western side of the Blackwater Hills, uplands that are underlain by sand, gravel, silt, and clay.

A small, fragmented proportion of the upland areas (totaling less than 450 acres) remains as upland pine (FNAI global/state ranks: G3/S2) (or sandhill [G3/S2] at some sites) in somewhat natural condition. One of these stands was visited during the field evaluation. It supported a mixed age stand of longleaf pine with some remnant native groundcover including sparse wiregrass. Before it was converted to pine plantations, upland pine was the dominant natural community within the proposed project and vicinity. Bottomland forest (G4/S3) is the most extensive natural community within the proposed project. It occurs as a closed-canopy forest on terraces and levees in floodplains of larger streams and rivers. Only one area of bottomland forest was visited during the field assessment. Loblolly pine had been planted on the upper slopes of the community, creating moderately dense pine stands.

Agricultural land and pastures comprise only a small part of the proposal and include food plots for wildlife. Other ruderal areas include cemeteries, utility rights-of-way, sand pits, clearings, and successional hardwood forests that often develop along the interface between planted pine stands and adjacent agricultural land.

Rare plants such as Florida Flame Azalea and White-top pitcherplant are found in the forest. Rare animals that have been documented on this site include gopher tortoise, the alligator snapping turtle, little blue heron, the swallow-tailed kite and Bachmann's sparrow.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>Panhandle lily</i>	G2/S2
<i>Turk's cap lily</i>	G5/S1
Gulf crayfish	G4/S1
Harlequin Darter	G5/S1
<i>Florida flame azalea</i>	G3/S3
<i>Hairy-peduncled Beaksedge</i>	G3/S3
Alligator snapping turtle	G3/S3
Alligator Gar	G3G4/S3
bluenose Shiner	G3G4/S3S4
Spiny Softshell	G5/S3

25 rare species are associated with the project

Public Use

The purpose for conserving this area would be to preserve working forest lands and return them to the historic stands of longleaf pine and accompanying habitat for flora and fauna via a



perpetual conservation easement document, and to provide resource protection for the Escambia River watershed. The owner has indicated an interest in making the site available for some limited research or educational efforts, therefore this proposal meets the education measure to some degree. The Division of Recreation and Parks reviewed the proposal and said the project area has thousands of acres of rolling uplands where hiking, biking, horseback riding, and camping could be accommodated. However, it is expected that the recreational experience would be of low quality due to the monotonous conditions and lack of diversity. Paddling, boating, and fishing appear to be impractical on most of the narrow seepage streams due to the shallow channels, dense vegetation and an abundance of tree falls. Boating access to the Escambia River is very limited. There are several public ramps on each side of the river but only one ramp was identified on the subject property, just south of the public ramp at Chumuckla Springs. No tracts were identified that would be suitable for developing a state park.

Acquisition Planning

The Coastal Headwaters Longleaf Forest was submitted as a conservation easement by The Conservation Fund for the timber investment and the management company Resource Management Services (RMS), LLC. RMS is a timber investment and management organization (TIMO) and conducts silvicultural operations on multiple continents.

2014

On August 15, 2014, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) voted to allow this proposal to be evaluated, subsequently on December 12, 2014, ARC voted to add this project to the Florida Forever list in the Less-than-Fee category.

Coordination

There were no confirmed acquisition partners when this project was added. However, the landowner is in contact with the Federal Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service to match some federal funding with Florida Forever funding. The applicants may explore other less-than-fee acquisition opportunities as well. The landowner is interested in phased acquisition.

Management Policy Statement

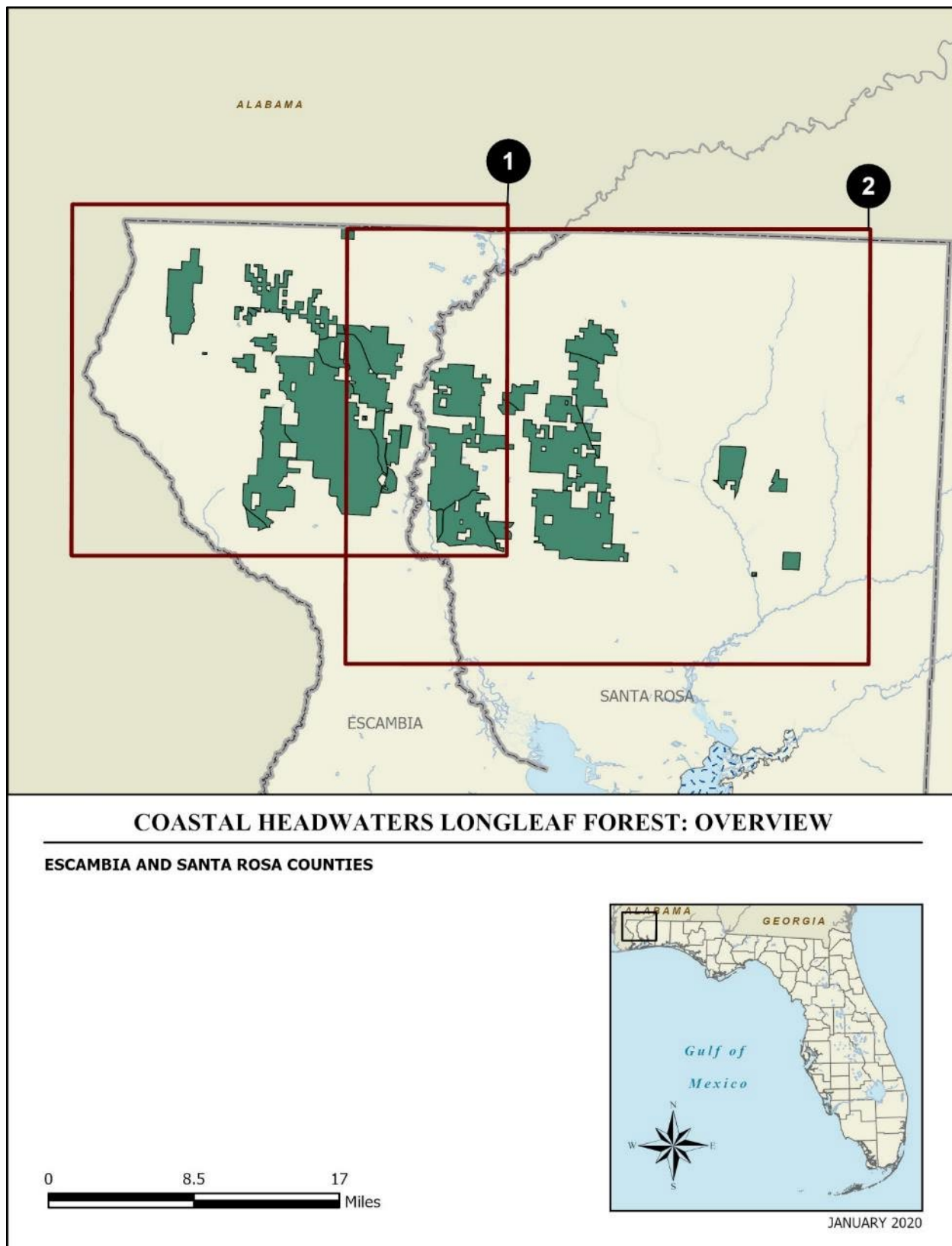
As a conservation easement or less-than-fee interest, the project will be managed with restrictions by the private landowner. The purchase of the development rights, the prohibition of the further conversion of existing natural areas to more intensive uses and limited public



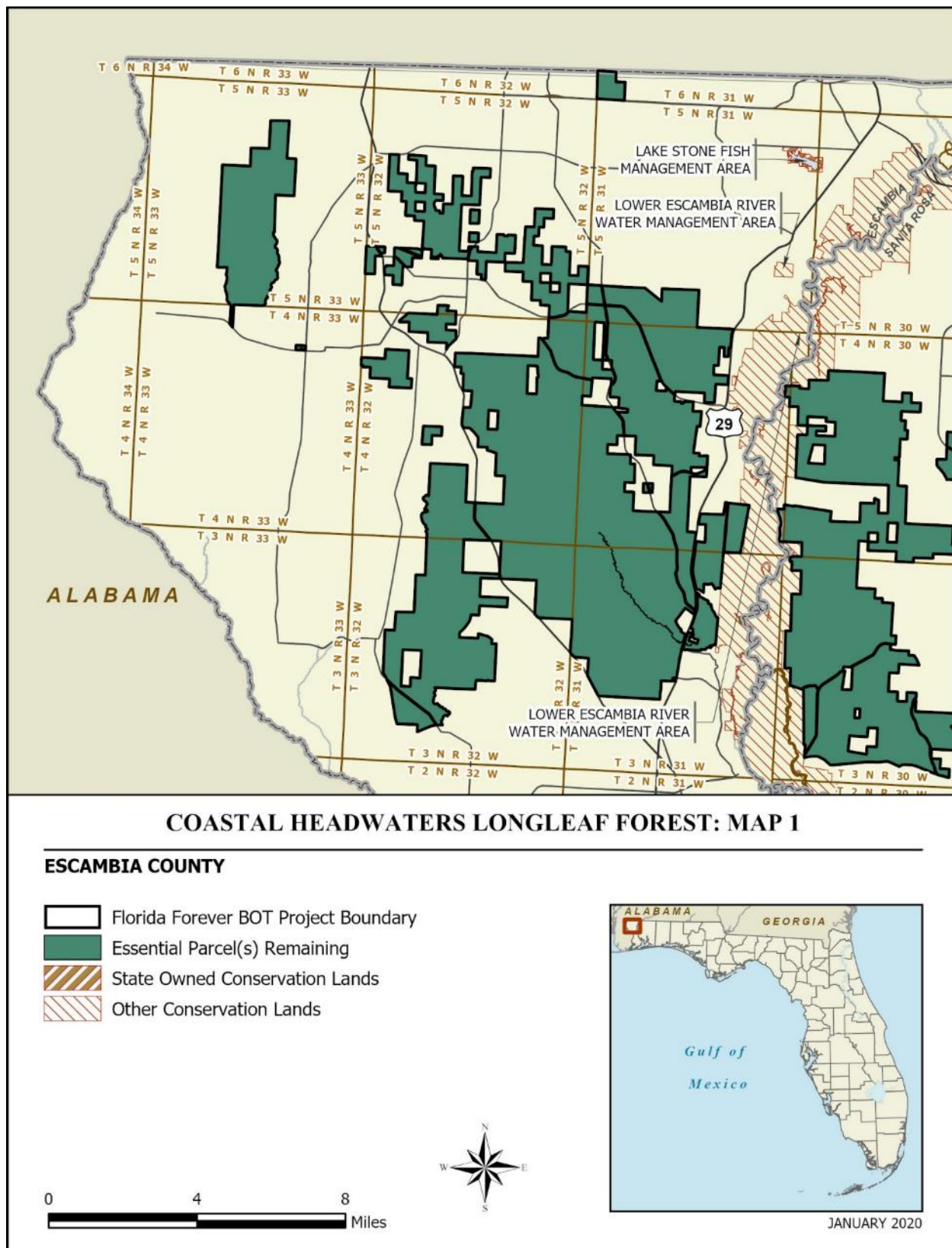
access will likely be the primary focus of the conservation easement. For this project, however, the landowner proposes to agree to a more specific level of management for burn intervals and longleaf pine harvesting age.

Management Prospectus

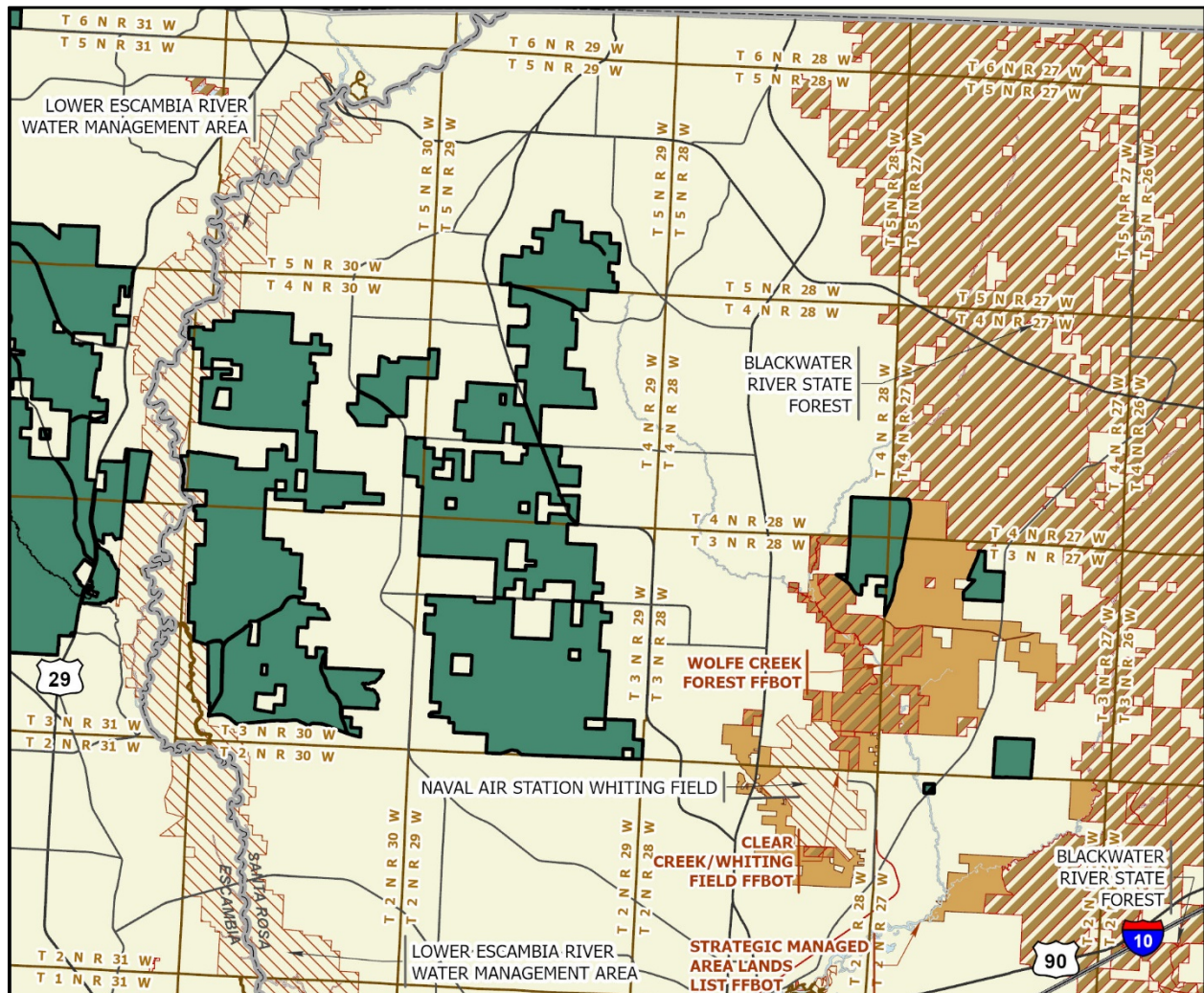
The Office of Environmental Services is to ensure oversight of the conservation easement on this project.



Map 1 : FNAI, January 2021



Map 2 : FNAI, January 2021

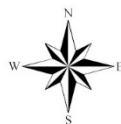


COASTAL HEADWATERS LONGLEAF FOREST: MAP 2

ESCAMBIA AND SANTA ROSA COUNTIES

-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Essential Parcel(s) Remaining
-  State Owned Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects

0 5 10
Miles



FEBRUARY 2021

Map 3 : FNAI, January 2021